DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 345 376 EA 023 973

AUTHOR Cohn, Kathleen C.; Sweeney, R. Carol
TITLE Principal Mentoring Programs: Are School Districts Providing the Leadership?
PUB DATE 22 Apr 92
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, April 20-24, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Effectiveness; *Collegiality; Elementary Secondary Education; *Leadership Training; *Mentors; *Principals; School Districts; *Staff Orientation
IDENTIFIERS California

ABSTRACT

Findings from a study that determined the extent to which school districts utilized formal new mentoring programs for principals and examined the nature of such programs are presented in this paper. Methodology involved a survey of 40 school districts in a large urban region of southern California, which elicited 23 responses; interviews with the overseers of 8 mentoring programs; and interviews with 1 mentor and mentee from each of the 8 programs. Based on the findings, a model for district principal mentoring programs is proposed. Its major components include institutionalization, structures and process, mentor selection, training, rewards, multiple mentor planning, and socialization. Conclusions are that program success depends on the value placed on mentoring within the school district, and that districts should strongly consider implementing such programs for principals, especially for those from underrepresented groups. (21 references) (LMI)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED345376

# PRINCIPAL MENTORING PROGRAMS:

# ARE SCHOOL DISTRICTS PROVIDING THE LEADERSHIP?

Kathleen C. Cohn

R. Carol Sweeney

California State University, Los Angeles

Paper presented at the
American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting,
San Francisco, April 22, 1992

EA 023 973

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

K. Cohn

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

# PRINCIPAL MENTORING PROGRAMS: ARE SCHOOL DISTRICTS PROVIDING THE LEADERSHIP?

## Introduction

As the issue of diversity and equity becomes more widely embraced as a value essential to the good health of the school culture and community, policies and practices which support and enhance this value must be inacted. Policies and practices which take into account cultural, racial and gender differences will serve as concrete examples of the school district's commitment to the valuing of the atypical. Perhaps recruitment and hiring practices exemplify such a commitment more profoundly than most. It is no wonder then, that many school districts, especially urban ones, are recognizing their responsibility to recruit and select principals from underrepresented groups who more closely reflect the diversity of the student population. But recruitment and hiring are not enough. Retention and success for new atypical principals should be the goal and the norm.

## Theoretical Framework

It has been well documented that new principals frequently feel isolated and alone. The opportunity for reflection and feedback is not readily available. New principals tend to focus on issues associated with day-to-day survival rather than the critical issues associated with effective leadership. Women and minorities in particular do not receive adequate feedback regarding their

performance as school leaders. In addition, they are faced with a variety of expectations and demands which the white male does not experience (Valverde and Brown, 1988). It has also been noted (Marshall, 1991) that atypical administrators, i.e. women, minorities, and risk takers, frequently ignore or suppress the issue of their gender or race when they contemplate their professional roles. This helps them to cope with and succeed in organizations that vary opportunities, expectations, and rewards for the atypical.

Mentoring should be an integral part of the successful assimilation by these new principals to this demanding leadership role. The literature clearly indicates that success and advancement in management and administration is enhanced through mentoring and that those who are mentored do better than those who are not (Adam, 1986; Collins, 1983; Daresh, 1989; Kouba, 1984; Levinson, 1977). Kanter (1977) concluded that if sponsors are important for the success of men in organizations, then they must be essential for women. And while spontaneous mentoring may be regarded as more effective (Clawson, 1985), it is also selective and exclusionary. Women and ethnic minorities are therefore mentored less frequently and have a harder time getting mentors than do white males (Moore, 1982; Mertz et al, 1987).

One method to compensate for this is to initiate formalized mentoring programs for new principals. However, the literature suggests that this practice draws mixed reviews (Clawson, 1985; Henecke, 1983; Kram, 1985). Despite expressed caution regarding formalized mentoring programs, it seems that attempts to increase

mentoring opportunities for minorities and women merit consideration. Kram (1985) suggested that the risks of formalizing a mentoring program could be reduced by educating the members of the organization about the value of the mentoring function, and by introducing structural changes within the organization that encourage and reward mentoring behavior. Alleman (1989) and Gillespie (1989) both found that mentors who had been trained had a higher level of mentoring activity and that their proteges rated their relationship significantly higher with regard to career benefit and professional development.

## Purpose of the Study

If formalized mentoring programs can enhance the performance of new principals, then one might expect the practice to be prevalent among school districts. The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which school districts were utilizing formalized mentoring programs to support and assist new principals, and to examine the nature of such mentoring programs.

The specific objectives were to identify the following: 1) how prevalent is the use of mentoring programs for new principals; 2) how existing mentoring programs are initiated and organized; 3) how mentors are selected; 4) what training and preparation is provided for mentors; 5) essential skills for mentors; 6) the level of effectiveness of the program from both the proteges' and the mentors' perspectives; 7) the unique needs associated with the

mentoring of the principal from an underrepresented group; and 8) essential elements of a model for a principal mentoring program.

## Methodology

The study was conducted in a large urban region in Southern California. An initial survey was mailed to 40 school districts to identify those districts which had formalized mentoring programs for new principals. Of the 23 responding school districts, only eight professed to have any kind of mentoring program for principals. If a mentoring program was in place, the respondents were asked to identify a contact person in the school district.

The identified persons were contacted and interviews were conducted with the overseers of the mentoring programs. The interviews were structured in that a predetermined set of questions was asked, but the questions were open-ended and allowed for flexibility in follow-up questioning. The overseer also provided the name of one mentor and one mentee to participate in a similar interview. The questions focused on the perceived effectiveness of a mentoring program in ensuring the success of new principals, providing feedback and reflection, and the critical issue of mentor selection and assignment. Additionally, preferred structures for formalized mentoring programs including training programs and specific mentoring behaviors and skills were solicited.

## Findings

Of the 40 school districts contacted, 23 responded with only eight indicating they had any kind of mentoring program for

principals. Those examined were primarily informal in structure and had been implemented by one individual who had a particular interest and belief in mentoring. Typically this individual either directly supervised principals or in some cases had staff development responsibilities within the district. The mentoring programs were so informal in nature that it might be more appropriate to refer to them as practices.

The operation and the monitoring of the programs varied considerably. In one district the overseer of the program met monthly with the mentor to discuss the process, relationship, and progress of the mentee. Most districts were far less structured, leaving it up to the mentor and the new principal to sustain, shape, and define their relationship unaided by the overseer. This could mean that there was never a meeting between the overseer and the mentor regarding the progress of the protege. One district did have monthly meetings for new principals. This was not in conjunction with the mentors, but actually served as a type of management training session for the new principals dealing with such issues as the opening and closing of the school year.

Mentors and proteges reported various types of interactions. One mentor felt a responsibility to periodically arrange for a meeting with the new principal over lunch or refreshments away from the school site or school district. This physical absence from the work place facilitated leaving the stresses behind. More relaxed discussion without interruptions could take place. The informal atmosphere also contributed to the development of the personal relationship the mentor felt was important to the mentoring process. All of the

mentors and mentees indicated that they relyed heavily on telephone contacts to keep in touch and to get validation or advice from the mentor about a particular decision

The selection of mentors is considered to be critical to the effectiveness of the mentoring process. In all cases, the mentors were selected because of their effectiveness as a principal. Some of the mentors had moved on to new assignments within the district, but all had been exemplary principals. Those skills considered to be essential for effective mentors included exceptional performance as a principal, understanding of human dynamics, good communication, enthusiasm, and knowledge of curriculum, the community, and district politics and practices. But perhaps the most important skill or trait noted was the ability and willingness to teach and coach the new principal in these special skills that the mentor had developed and successfully practiced on the job. The overseers of the programs consistently referred to this sense of selflessness, even an eagerness to pass on successful practices to the fledgling new principal, to share ideas and to reflect together. Many good or even great principals can successfully run their own site, but seem driven by a competitive spirit which doesn't lend itself to the role of mentor, coach, and teacher.

Despite these requirements for such high level skills for mentors, none of the districts provided formalized training for the mentors. Some held organizing meetings with the mentors, and as noted before, one overseer met monthly with the mentors, but those meetings tended to focus on the progress of the new principal rather than on any training for the mentor.

Compatibility was of considerable importance in the selection and matching of mentor and mentee. However, none of the districts had a set criteria to apply to the matching process. The district with the most formalized program had consciously assigned mentors of like ethnicity to the new principals. The person overseeing this program believed that the support of a mentor within ones racial, or ethnic group would facilitate assimilation to the role of principal and ensure success and retention of these atypical new principals.

Mentees reported the programs to be extremely effective, especially in the first year of a principalship. They all reported a greater sense of security and confidence knowing they had a mentor from whom they could seek sage advise. They did not have a preferred method for interacting with their mentor, but rather let their need dictate the use of a quick phone call or a lengthy discussion over lunch or refreshments away from the demands of the job. Despite the recognition by the overseers of the need to establish a climate which not only allows but encourages the asking of questions by new recruits, none of the districts provided new principals with training or induction sessions to address this or any other aspect of getting the most out of a mentoring relationship. The risk then still remains that the asking of questions by a new principal could be perceived as a sign of weakness and incompetence.

The literature suggests that the evaluation function should be excluded from the mentoring relationship. This practice creates a climate for complete trust within the mentoring relationship. This means that the supervisor in most cases should not serve as mentor. All of the districts except one adhered to this principle. According to

the overseer of the program in that district this decision had been made to address a clearly recognized need for improvement with one new principal. Provisions had been made for this particular principal to also have a peer coach (a peer principal) in addition to the assigned mentor supervisor.

## Model for District Principal Mentoring Programs

It appears that the use of mentoring programs for new principals is not a common practice, despite that apparent need and effectiveness of similar programs in some school districts and other organizations. School districts would do well to consider establishing such programs, but careful attention must be given to the planning process. We propose the model described in this section to guide such an effort. The major components of the model for a principal mentoring program are: institutionalization, structures and process, mentor selection, training, assigning mentors rewards for mentoring, planning for multiple mentors, and socialization.

### Institutionalization

Institutionalizing a mentoring program is the first and essential step to sending a clear message to the members of the organization that mentoring is valued, encouraged, and in deed is a responsibility of all senior members. Mere lip service to mentoring is not enough. The power of the printed word cannot be denied. Publishing materials describing the goals and structure of the program lends legitimacy to the program, stimulates interest, and attracts prospective participants. Formal presentations to introduce the

program to members of the organization would serve as an initial step in the process of institutionalizing mentoring. Mentoring service could be built into the performance appraisal system as another way to reinforce the importance of mentoring to the organization. However, there should be no penalties for those who choose not to participate or are not selected to serve because they do not meet the criteria. As noted elsewhere in this paper, not all people are fit to serve as mentors.

**Structure and Process**

A basic principle of program implementation is to establish a monitoring system. This not only assures accountability for the program going forward, but it provides opportunities for continuous feedback on the effectiveness of the program. Because mentoring is essentially a relationship which must develop over time in a way that suits the two people involved, there must be adequate flexibility. But this is not to mean that the pairs should be assigned and left to their own devices. Regular group meetings, expectations for contacts between mentor and mentee, suggested areas for support, appropriate feedback are possible elements of a program which suggest structure and process. Identifying and planning experiences essential to the induction of the new principal help to guide the relationship. But caution should be taken not to over plan. Preliminary plans for the first phase of the relationship is advised. The next phase can evolve based on the mentee's successes and any newly identified areas for growth.

**Mentor Selection**

Criteria for the selection of mentors should be established. Volunteering to be a mentor should not be sufficient grounds for selection. As this study revealed, exemplary performance as a principal is essential to being an effective mentor. But perhaps even more important is a commitment and a sense of responsibility to pass on to the fledgling principal those pearls of wisdom and successful practices the mentor has learned over the years. The ability and willingness of the mentor to teach, coach, and provide constructive feedback to the new principal should head the criteria. Additional qualities and skills should be identified. These should be in tune with the overall values held high within the culture of the school district. The participants in this study agreed that mentors should have skills in human relations, communication, and curriculum. Knowledge about the politics of the community and the school district were considered extremely important. An overall enthusiasm for the job of principal was also noted. A school district would want to consider the job description and expectations for new principals when establishing selection criteria for mentors. Mentors who do not match the district's expectations could guide the mentee in a direction unacceptable to the district, thereby placing the new principal in jeopardy.

**Training**

Training should be provided for both the mentor and the mentee. The mentors need to know how to establish and maintain a relationship, plan appropriate experiences, and provide effective feedback. They must learn to provide career counseling and assist the new principal in developing a professional growth plan. The

mentees need to know their roles and responsibilities. They must understand that asking questions is important and expected.

**Assigning Mentors**

The matching of mentor to mentee is very important. When ever possible, the two should have some voice in the initial matchup. Consideration should be given to gender, ethnicity, race, or cultural background. If at any point the relationship appears not to be working, it should be abandoned with no negative consequences to anyone. New assignments should be made immediately, with the process starting anew.

**Rewards**

Rewarding of mentors is important to establishing the program and its value to the organization. But the form the rewards can take will vary depending on the school district. Private industry often provides bonus or merit pay. Although less common in school districts it did occur in one of the districts participating in this study. Special awards and time allotments for working with the mentee are certainly appropriate rewards. Whatever they might be, they need to be identified and built into the structure of the program.

**Planning for Multiple Mentors**

The concept of multiple mentors is important. One mentor cannot be all things to the new principal. Part of the responsibility of the mentor is to help the mentee learn how to get good information to make good decisions. That good information will come from a variety of sources and people. New mentoring relationships may evolve. All should prepare for the ending of a mentoring relationship, or at the very least the transformation of that

relationship into one which becomes more reciprocal over time. Mentors must also be prepared to let go when the new principal is ready to grow beyond the relationship.

### Socialization

A vital aspect of the new principal's success and retention in the school district is the degree of fit between the individual and the district. As more principals are selected from underrepresented groups, new dynamics are introduced into the socialization process. Marshall (1991) provides for cultural and gender perspectives in her socialization model. Districts must take care not to socialize away the unique qualities of the culturally or gender different principal, for these unique perspectives are critical to their effectiveness with the culturally diverse student populations they serve.

But the fact remains that if one is to be retained as a principal in the district, one must be adequately socialized to the culture and politics of the district. It is therefore the responsibility of the district leadership to put into place policies and practices which free the atypical principal from having to suppress their racial, gender, or cultural values. This can best be done in an environment or school district culture which values diversity.

## Implications

Although new principal mentoring programs are not widely utilized, the administrators of school districts which do have such programs view them as highly effective. Many urban school districts are experiencing dramatic demographic changes in student populations and are striving to recruit and select principals who more closely reflect the student populations. Mentoring programs

for these principals from underrepresented groups can contribute to their success and retention and provide qualitative leadership and stability for school districts, as illustrated in this study. School districts establishing mentoring programs for new principals would do well to systematically plan, implement, and monitor those programs.

The model presented in this paper should serve as a guide for such a program. The critical elements of mentor selection, training, assignment, and reward; and mentee training are stressed. But the success of the program is dependent on the value placed on mentoring within the school district. Above all, mentoring should be a growth experience for all, not a process which socializes away the uniqueness of the atypical principal. The results of this study indicate that school districts should strongly consider establishing mentor programs for new principals, especially those from underrepresented groups.

## REFERENCE LIST


Adam, M. (1986. The effects of mentoring on the career paths of administrators in community colleges in the state of Michigan. Ed.D Dissertation. Western Michigan University.

Clawson, J.G. (1985, April). Is mentoring necessary? Training and Development Journal. 36-43.

Collins, N. (1983). Professional women and their mentors. N.J. : Prentice Hall, Inc.

Daresh, John C. (1990, May). Formation: the missing ingredient in administrator preparation. NASSP Bulletin. 1-5.

Fenske, M.M. (1986). A comparison of the perceptions of mentoring relationships in the careers of female chief academic officers of education. Ph.D. Dissertation, George Peabody, Vanderbilt.

Hennecke, M.J. (1983, July). Mentors and mentees: How to build relationships that work. Training.

Kanter, R.M. (1977). Men and women of the corporation. New York: Basic Books.

Kouba, N.L. (1984). The influence of helping relationships on the career development o college presidents. Ph.D. Dissertation, St. Louis University.

Kram, K.E. (1985, Annual). Creating conditions that encourage mentoring. Developing Human Resources. 239-258.

Levinson, D.J. (1977) The seasons of a man's life. New York: Ballantine Books

Marshall, Catherine. (1991). Expansion of socialization theory: micropolitics, gender and race. Paper presented at American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Chicago.

McNeer, E.J. (1981). The role of mentoring in career development of women administrators in higher education. Ph.D. Dissertation. Ohio State University.

Mertz, N., Welch, O., Henderson, J. (1990). Executive mentoring: myths, issues, strategies. Newton, MA: WEEA Publishing Center

Mertz, Norma T., Welch, O.M., Henderson, J. (1987) Why women aren't mentored. A paper presented at the American Educational Research Association SIG Research on Women and Education, Portland, OR.

Missirian, A.K. (1980). The process of mentoring in the career development of female managers. Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Massachusetts.

Moore, D. (1982). California Community College women administrators: a study of mentors and mentees. Ed.D. Dissertation. University of Laverne.

Orth, C.D., Wilkinson, H.E. & Benfari, R.C. (year unknown). The manager's role as coach and mentor. Organizational Dynamics. 66-74.

Queralt, M. (1981). The role of the mentor in the career development of university faculty members and academic administrators. Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Miami.

Rouche, G.R. (1979, January-February). Much ado about mentors. Harvard Business Review, 57, 14-28.

Vaudrin, D. M. (1983). Factors contributing to the upward mobility of women managers and an exploratory study of mentoring and other influential relationships. Ed.D. Dissertation. Seattle University.

Villani, S. (1983). Mentoring and sponsoring as a way for women to overcome internal barriers to heightened career aspirations and achievement. Ed.D. Dissertation. Northeastern University.